

The Psychology of Repression and Polarization in Authoritarian Regimes

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Abstract

Polarization among political groups has important consequences for successful democratic consolidation during transitions from authoritarianism. However, existing theories fail to explain why these groups emerge more or less polarized from authoritarian periods. In this paper, I test one possible mechanism through which the repression that defines authoritarian regimes affects processes of polarization in these systems. Drawing on psychological theories of social identity, I posit that the nature of repression – whether it targets a specific group, or is more widespread – alters group members’ group identification, in turn changing the perceived distance between groups, and ultimately shaping the level of affective and preference polarization among these groups through processes of group differentiation. I test the proposed causal relationship through lab experiments conducted with 434 adult citizens in Tunis, Tunisia in May 2016. The results reveal that a targeted repression prime increases in-group identification and affective and preference polarization between groups, while a widespread prime decreases these same measurements. In addition, the widespread prime increases identification with the out-group. Subsequent analyses reveal the effect of the primes on preference polarization appears to be mediated through group identification. I discuss the implications of these results for Egypt and Tunisia, two historical cases in which previous regime repression conditioned levels of polarization among opposition, with important consequence for countries’ potential democratic transitions.

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Introduction

Cooperation among political groups during democratic transitions is a major determinant of successful democratic consolidation.¹ Further, the level of political polarization among these actors is an important factor in compromise and cooperation.² Political polarization conditions contingent cooperative behavior: a higher degree of polarization makes it less likely that political actors will compromise over fundamental questions of identity and procedure during moments critical to the success of democratic consolidation.³ Yet despite the centrality of polarization in contingent theories of democratic consolidation, the transitology literature leaves unexplained the process by which different levels of polarization occur among political actors under authoritarian regimes.⁴ In particular, the relative positioning of non-regime opposition political groups has been neglected. The brief explanations put forward mirror existing theories of polarization, in which either the structural characteristics of political systems, or the strategy or ideology of political actors, determine political preferences and resulting levels of polarization. However, overlooked in existing accounts of polarization is a complete understanding of the process by which actors come to differentiate their identities and how they form, update, and articulate their preferences in contrast to others. A foundational literature in social psychology tells us that both *context* and *resulting group identities* matter for the way individuals see and position themselves relative to others.⁵ By failing to take this process into account, existing theories do not adequately explain how the particularities of authoritarian contexts, where pre-transitional polarization occurs, influence preference formation and the resulting distribution of preferences. Authoritarian contexts are defined by state repression of opposition political actors.⁶

Exploring the effects of this repression is central to tracing how cleavages translate into political contestation in authoritarian contexts, and to understanding how authoritarian states exacerbate differences in preferences, setting the stage for cooperation among previous opposition groups newly empowered and charged with decision-making during transition periods. In this paper, I introduce a two-stage theory of one possible mechanism through which the the repression that defines authoritarian regimes affects processes and levels of polarization in these systems. My theory builds on insights from social psychology on the causes and consequences of group identification. I argue that repression affects how actors come to identify themselves and the extent

¹ Rustow (1970); O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986); Di Palma (1990).

² Haggard and Kaufman (1995); Huntington (1984).

³ Linz and Stepan (1996); Kitschelt, Mansfeldova, Markowski, and Toka (1999); McFaul (2002); Mainwaring, O'Donnell, and Valenzuela (1992); O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986); Przeworski (1991); Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds (2013).

⁴ DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson (1996) note that the term 'polarization' can refer both to a state of preference distribution at a given point in time, as well as to a process through which groups grow more (or less) distinct in preferences over time. I use the word in both ways. In 2011, there existed a level of polarization between group affect and preferences, measured at a single moment in time. In addition, I trace processes of polarization, documenting changes in the distance between groups' affect and relative policy preferences over time in two cases.

⁵ Turner (1978); Brown (1984); Brewer and Brown (1998).

⁶ Linz (2000).

to which they differentiate themselves from other groups. Identification then affects groups' political preferences and the distribution of preferences among rival political groups. The nature of repression – i.e., whether it targets a specific opposition group, or is widespread across all opposition groups – determines the resulting nature of polarization. Widespread repression strengthens identification with competing opposition groups, which in turn decreases polarization among them. Targeted repression, following the logic of divide-and-conquer, increases polarization across the opposition. By influencing group identity and related characteristics and preferences among the opposition, repression conditions the level of political polarization in the moment of transition from authoritarianism.

The paper proceeds as follows. I first situate my inquiry within the relevant literature on polarization, preference formation, and repression. I then introduce my theory, building from findings in social psychology. Next, I present the design and results of lab experiments carefully designed to test the proposed causal relationship, and which I conducted with a sample of 434 adult citizens in Tunis, Tunisia in May 2016. I discuss the results' implications for the historical cases of Tunisia and Egypt, two Middle East cases in which repression conditioned levels of polarization among opposition, with important consequence for these countries' potential democratic transitions in 2011, before concluding.

Existing Theories of Polarization

In contingent theories of authoritarian transitions, polarization conditions the cooperative behavior that is so important for elite cooperation. A higher degree of polarization decreases the likelihood that actors will compromise and cooperate over fundamental questions of identity and procedure during moments critical to the success of democratic consolidation.⁷ However, transitionologists often refer to polarization without adequately defining the term, using instead terms such as “consensual unity”⁸ of elite actors.

Polarization is broadly the distance between parties on dimensions that matter for political cooperation, and includes two components. We might think of the two components as the extent to which groups dislike each other, and the extent to which they disagree with each other. First, polarization includes *affective* distance in the realm of emotions, feelings, and attitudes.⁹ In the words of Achen and Bartels (2017, 228), “identities are not primarily about adherence to a group ideology or creed. They are emotional attachments that transcend thinking.” Affect refers to the nature of a psychological attachment to a group, not only measured by positive assessments and warm feelings generated by in-group measurements but also by negative evaluations of the out-group.¹⁰ In the

⁷ For example, see Kitschelt et al. (1999); Linz and Stepan (1978); McFaul (2002); Mainwaring, O'Donnell, and Valenzuela (1992); O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986); Przeworski (1991)).

⁸ Higley and Burton (1989).

⁹ Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes (2012); Iyengar and Westwood (2015); Mason (2015).

¹⁰ Ellis and Stimson (2012).

American context, identities such as Democrat and Republican, liberal and conservative are often pitted against each other. Affective polarization occurs when group members hold negative views and distrust members of the out-group, and perceive a higher level of social distance between their group and the out-group.

Second, polarization includes distance in policy *preferences*.¹¹ Preference polarization occurs when group members perceive of increasing disagreement with other groups on political issues of central importance. This does not imply a changing of motivating ideology, but rather a shift in presentation. To draw again from the American context, the Democratic party's motivating ideology is centered on creating a government that intervenes and regulates the economy to create social and economic equality. While that ideology has not changed, the party's policy preferences have shifted as the party redefines what falls under the scope of government responsibility, the nature of that responsibility, and what specific programs can achieve this goal – and how these policies differ from their Republican counterparts.

Though the polarization that matters for democratic transitions occurs under conditions of authoritarianism, scholars' collective understanding of the causes and processes of polarization builds nearly exclusively on evidence from democratic regimes, which grant a high level of autonomy to elites organized as political groups in mobilizing underlying cleavages. Affective polarization relies on the strength of partisanship as a social identity in dividing the electorate into meaningful groups.¹² The strength of in-group identification – here, with a identity tied to a political party or group serving as the basis – predicts the level of bias against out-group members,¹³ and that shifts can occur in this bias over time in response to specific information environments, such as the media¹⁴ or party and elite cues.¹⁵ As affective polarization increases, in-group members become less tolerant of out-group members across a number of measurements of discrimination..

Existing explanations for preference polarization fall into three categories: structural, strategic, and ideological. In structural explanations, polarization is a reflection of factors external to the political system – namely, social cleavages along lines of class, sector, region, ethnicity, or conceptions of religion and state.¹⁶ Polarization is assumed to be an objective representation of structural differences in society, which condition the political placement and relative distribution of political groups who mobilize these interests in political competition.¹⁷ Variation in the distribution of preferences across cases stems from different underlying cleavage structures, and increased polarization in policy preferences results from a shifting of underlying cleavages.¹⁸ In strategic ex-

¹¹ Free and Cantril (1967); Ellis and Stimson (2012); Fiorina and Abrams (2008); Abramowitz (2010).

¹² Greene (2004).

¹³ Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Wetherell (1987); Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, and Rust (1993).

¹⁴ Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes (2012, 12).

¹⁵ Iyengar and Westwood (2015).

¹⁶ Lipset and Rokkan (1967); Evans and Whitefield (2000); Deegan-Krause (2006).

¹⁷ Haggard and Kaufman (2016).

¹⁸ Sigelman and Yough (1978); Ura and Ellis (2011); Lupu and Riedl (2013); Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds (2013);

planations, parties still create platforms reflecting underlying cleavages, but now internal aspects of the political system interfere with how the distribution of societal cleavages aggregates up to create political polarization. Electoral rules and institutions complicate the translation of interests into political competition and enhance or diminish polarization – for example, by requiring certain thresholds for participation and thus forcing certain partnerships and strategic placement by political groups.¹⁹ A third and final set of explanations for polarization focus on parties’ motivating ideologies. These theories often focus on parties with religious or radical ideologies.²⁰ In these explanations, ideological placement determines preferences and structures aggregate levels of polarization.²¹ Ideology is fairly constant and changes only as a result of parties’ inclusion in electoral competition, which exposes the previously excluded actors to other ideologies and democratic procedures, in turn updating the groups’ political positioning.²²

These established explanations are important to understand because they dominate thinking about how party placement is determined and how polarization occurs. Yet each approach proves severely lacking when applied to empirical evidence. Studies of affective polarization relies on exposure to the media or elite cues, yet does not explain the initial existence of dislike among groups, and whether or how it is causally related to preference polarization.²³ Structural accounts are framed as explanations for polarization, but often fail to explicate the causal link between structure and the distance between actors’ preferences. In structural studies, “people and their preferences tended to be collapsed into categories established by the interplay of theory and history. Once defined, say, as peasants, kings, Protestants, bureaucrats, or other such positions in the social order, agents were, of course, recognized as the bearers of preferences, but their content almost could be taken for granted.”²⁴ Similarly, strategic accounts analyzing polarization as the result of the internal factors of political systems generally find little or no effect; electoral laws and institutions do not exacerbate underlying structural polarization.²⁵ This may be because the majority of studies draw from democratic contexts, which by definition grant a high level of autonomy to elites organized as political groups in mobilizing underlying cleavages, or alternatively because these institutions do not function as theorized. Finally, parties assumed to be motivated by ideology often update their preferences, and not necessarily in response to increased liberalization. These parties can also shift emphasis on different parties of their ideology to reflect changes in preferences,

McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal (2006).

¹⁹ Sartori (1969); Cox (1987); Adams and Somer-Topcu (2009).

²⁰ These parties include the Islamist ones analyzed later in this paper. Much of the argument underpinning in the inclusion-moderation theories that seek to explain changes in Islamist ideology and behavior over time and once participating in electoral institutions, however limited, in the Middle East.

²¹ Huntington (1991); Przeworski and Sprague (1986); Mainwaring, O’Donnell, and Valenzuela (1992).

²² Clark (2006); Wickham (2004).

²³ Abramowitz (2013).

²⁴ Katznelson and Weingast (2005, 13).

²⁵ McCarty (2011).

undercutting the assumed deterministic relationship.²⁶

Incorporating Preference Formation into Polarization

Authoritarian regimes differ from democratic ones in a number of fundamental ways, such as how they utilize governmental institutions to maintain power. Thus, theories for polarization, drawn from democratic contexts, might not prove useful in thinking about actors' preferences during transitions from authoritarian regimes. More broadly, the issues with structural, strategic, and ideological explanations stem from a common problem: these theories do not incorporate an understanding of the way in which political preferences *actually* form. Well-established research based in social psychology demonstrates that preferences do not flow directly from structure, strategy, or ideology, but instead are created through a larger psychological process. Theories of polarization must ultimately be grounded in individual agency, particularly those of politicians, and thus requires a deeper investigation into the sources of preferences. The contemporary study of political behavior has increasingly incorporated findings from social psychology in order to understand the micro-foundational cognitive processes through which individuals form and update preferences. In psychological processes of preference formation, the lived experience of *context* and *resulting group identities* matter for the way individuals form and update preferences.

Preference formation is the process through which beliefs and evaluations emerge from and are updated by linkages between what people experience and what they feel, an “equilibrium between brain, body, and world.”²⁷ A focus on the individual-level, cognitive processes of preference formation reveals an iterative causal chain through which lived experiences give rise to identities, which create or update related beliefs, and ultimately form preferences. What political scientists call preferences, psychologists call attitudes, defined as “a person’s general evaluation of an object.”²⁸ “Object” in this usage includes a broad array of people, events, products, policies, and institutions; attitudes are people’s orientations towards these objects. Attitudes are shaped by beliefs, a “neutrally held probability distribution over possible characteristics of an object”.²⁹ Beliefs depend on information, or “any data potentially relevant to” future choices.³⁰ How one identifies oneself, and who else one considers to be a part of that group, alters how an individual processes new experiences and information, and subsequently updates beliefs about other groups and related preferences.³¹ As a result, one’s identity ultimately determines the attitudes one holds.

The focus on internal cognitive processes does not detract from structure, the “world” component of the above definition. Outside influences clearly matter; while individuals may have id-

²⁶ Schwedler (2006).

²⁷ Druckman and Lupia (2000, 3).

²⁸ O’Keefe (1990, 18).

²⁹ Churchland and Sejnowski (1992); Kandel, Schwartz, and Jessell (1995).

³⁰ Druckman and Lupia (2000, 5).

³¹ Lupia and McCubbins (1998).

iosyncratic tendencies, they also form opinions about other people and their ideas within certain structures, and identity only matters relative to other groups.³² Thus the historical processes, institutional settings, and ideologies which constitute structure are the starting point for politics and provide a baseline for identities, creating groups divided along specific dimensions of cleavage with potential for political contestation. But, as scholars of polarization and political cleavage formation have been careful to note, while patterns of polarization are clearly derived in some way from the structural context in which political actors find themselves,³³ these differences are not themselves deterministic of preferences, and cannot fully explain variation in the distribution of political preferences along a given axis across cases without engaging psychological theories focused on the individual. For example, the same levels of objective inequality or difference in opinion can result in varying levels of contentious politics and polarized preferences, and the way in which the translation occurs is conditional on the political context in which they are formed and in which political groups mobilize these preferences.³⁴ The way people act “cannot be inferred from their ‘objective’ circumstances; political action is contextual and strategic, but it also reflects the ideologies, values, and perceptions of actors.”³⁵

The missing link in existing theories of polarization is identity, a central and influential component of preference formation. Structure, institutional norms, and ideology do not matter in and of themselves, but rather in the way individuals and groups experience components of this context and place themselves within it. Lived political experiences are therefore the basis for translating structural conditions, institutional norms, and ideologies into political preferences. In modern politics, the lived experience which arguably matters most for political identity formation is that of the state. The state is the major realm of political contestation, political identities are constructed with relation to the state, and state behavior makes certain categories politically relevant.³⁶ State behavior is particularly influential when it reveals information about the nature of state and society, and both an individual’s and group’s role and relative position therein. Through repeated interactions with the state and its representatives, an individual receives new information about who she is, which group she belongs to, and what attributes her group claims. When state behavior is differential or unequal, an individual learns where her group stands relative to other groups. The iterative lived experience of the state induces learning and the updating of identities, which

³² Katznelson and Weingast (2005, 3-4) write that the best contemporary approach to institutions and preference formation requires that an understanding of the “building blocks of preferences – including interests, desires, values, opinions, tastes, and morals – be located inside thickly inscribed temporal and spatial contexts.” The focus, however, remains on individual agency.

³³ See Hall (2000, 2010) for a more in-depth discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of literature linking institutions and context with preference formation.

³⁴ For example, comparative essays in Katznelson and Zolberg (1986) argue that similar structural conditions produced very different notions of class formation across European countries. They explain this variation by engaging the historical realities of the daily lives of groups of working people.

³⁵ Mainwaring (1989, 16).

³⁶ Laitin (1998); Chandra (2012); Horowitz (1985, 1993); Mansbach and Rhodes (2007); Posner (2005).

in turn updates affect towards others and the preferences one holds relative to other groups. This process mirrors the cognitive process of preference formation; individual experiences of the state create and then update identities, which then alter an individual's preferences regarding people and policy.

If levels of polarization within a political system are closely organized around the preferences of political groups, and if these preferences are shaped by an identity formed through lived experience of the state and its institutions, then scholars must locate the origins of polarization in these lived experiences and fully investigate the differential experience of various political actors. Groups come to see themselves as either in conflict or in harmony as a result of lived political experiences, and they form and adjust their affect towards other political groups and their relative political preferences accordingly. The level of polarization on a given cleavage is thus specific to group experiences within a given system, explaining how similar structures can produce divergent outcomes. By failing to take the process of preference formation into account, existing theories do not fully account for how context, specifically shaped through informal institutions, matters for processes of polarization.

Repression in Authoritarian Contexts

Nearly all existing studies of polarization focus on democratic contexts, but the polarization that matters for democratic transitions and consolidation occurs in very different contexts, that of authoritarian political systems. Authoritarian contexts are characterized by repression, or severe state control of oppositional political actors.³⁷ Repression is defined as the coercive actions undertaken by regimes against actors challenging regimes' beliefs, institutions, and actions. With a focus on its coercive nature, repression most clearly refers to the physical tactics regimes utilize against opposition actors, including arrests, beatings, harassment, targeted assassinations, raids, torture, disappearances, targeted assassinations, and mass killings.³⁸ The use of repression is a strategy of state survival, consistently utilized by regimes to maintain their power.³⁹ The form of repression utilized by authoritarian regimes – i.e., which opposition groups repression targets – varies across cases. Early work on totalitarianism argued that repression was utilized with the intention of demobilizing entire societies.⁴⁰ Similarly, a seminal piece by Bellin (2004) on the exceptional nature of Middle East authoritarianism similarly suggests that all democratic minded regime challengers

³⁷ Linz (2000).

³⁸ (Davenport 2015, 29). Davenport notes that although physical repression is not the only strategy available to authoritarian regimes to confront mobilized opposition, it is the tactic used most, the one most feared by opposition activists, and the one which has received the most attention from academics, policy makers, and political activists, not least because it demonstrates the way a regime exploits the state's monopoly on violence to demobilize challengers. Moreover, considering repression as physical coercion is the only conception in which direct intentionality on behalf of regimes can be assumed (Hibou 2011); arrested individuals and targeted groups are keenly aware that they are being punished for their explicitly political opposition and related behavior.

³⁹ Davenport (2007); Peters (1985); Rejali (1991, 1994).

⁴⁰ Arendt (1966).

are targeted for demobilization by regime repression. However, most contemporary authoritarian regimes rely on selective repression to divide opponents, though the relative balance and choice of targets differ significantly across cases.⁴¹

Research on repression has overwhelmingly focused the effectiveness of different forms of repression for dependent variables related to the longevity of regimes. Regime repression is most effective when it divides opposition actors and pits them against each other.⁴² In these studies, scholars maintain that opposition groups act strategically in response to political opportunity structures as created by a regime's repressive tactics. Repression alters groups' calculus for strategic action by changing constraints and hindering their ability to individually mobilize against the regime. This then changes the probability of cooperation across groups when contesting the regime.

Similar to existing studies of polarization, scholarship on the effects of repression ignore group psychology. The sole focus is strategy: the strategic environment and material incentives determine whether opposition parties can agree, converge on a set of preferences, and cooperate, as well as which parties will do so. As a result, academic understanding of repression has tended "to neglect the targets and victims of state repression... this leaves us in a situation where comparatively little effort [has been] extended to understanding what impact repression has on the individuals subjected to it or on the broader society in which these actions take place."⁴³ Contact theory demonstrates that simply bringing groups together in favorable strategic circumstances will not force preference convergence or cooperative behavior.⁴⁴ Even under specific opportunity structures, "opposition cohesion or the ability of various groups to unite around a common agenda for change and to mobilize either jointly or concurrently against the authoritarian regime is not a given."⁴⁵ Indeed, decreases in polarization precede – rather than result from – the cooperative behavioral outcomes often focused on in the literature. Ultimately, lower levels of polarization are a necessary precursor for cooperative behavior, above and beyond a given, favorable political opportunity structure. The distance between opposition parties' policy preferences determines their level of cohesion, their ability to compromise, and ultimately their effectiveness in winning reform and concessions from the ruling regime.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Tarrow (1998, 49). Lust (2005) similarly documents that different authoritarian regimes utilize different "structures of contestation" to stay in power. The author differentiates between opposition groups based on whether the state grants them legal status and permits them to officially contest elections, or whether the group is excluded from official routes of contestation. Different kinds of "structures of contestation" exist due to the relative balance of legal and banned opposition. As real-world examples demonstrate, and as Lust's own commentary suggests, repression of a group is orthogonal to its legal status; both legal and illegal groups can be and are targeted by regimes. However, her larger point stands and is applicable to state repression: regimes utilize different kinds of repressive policies, differently targeting certain groups in order to maintain their power.

⁴² Albrecht (2006); Howard and Roessler (2006); Lust (2005); Schwedler and Clark (2006); Shehata (2009); van de Walle (2006).

⁴³ Davenport (2015, 9).

⁴⁴ Brewer (1996).

⁴⁵ Shehata (2009, 11).

⁴⁶ Bratton and van de Walle (1997, 198).

Personal accounts of repression reveal that it is not simply an extreme structural, behavioral constraint, but rather an influential emotional, psychological, and physical trauma.⁴⁷ This is the exact type of experience that forms the basis of identity and influences related preference formation. Considering repression as a lived experience, rather than a structural constraint, suggests a pathway that mirrors the psychological formation of preferences through identity: experiences of repression affect individuals' and groups' perception of inequalities, differences, and identities, and thus the type of experience which exerts an influence on processes of preference formation.

A Psychological Theory of Repression and Polarization

I posit that repression affects levels of political polarization through a two-stage process. In the first stage, experiences of repression, and the extent to which they are shared with other groups or are concentrated within one's own, alter the salience and nature of in-group identification. Standard feelings of "groupness" and the ability to differentiate between one's in- and out-groups emerge from even the most arbitrary of group membership assignments and in basic group interactions.⁴⁸ But importantly, the strength of group identification increases with experiences that treat groups of individuals as such.⁴⁹ Shared experiences of trauma are particularly effective at increasing group identification, as these experiences foster bonding and emphasize shared identities and attributes.⁵⁰ In addition, shared traumatic experiences can create new in-group identities by exposing previously unconnected individuals or groups to the same events.⁵¹

As noted in the previous section, authoritarian regimes by definition employ repression against political opposition but vary in their targets. While some regimes use targeted repression, singling out a specific opposition group, others employ widespread repression against the entire spectrum of political opposition actors. Social psychology offers predictions for how the nature of repression should affect identities among opposition groups. In the first stage of the causal process, widespread experiences of repression should decrease in-group identification, as the groups targeted form a larger collective of victimized opposition sharing experiences of repression across multiple groups. In contrast, targeted experiences of repression should heighten in-group identification for the singularly targeted group, as only in-group members share experiences of repression.

In the second stage, heightened in-group identity conditions levels of political polarization

⁴⁷ Peters (1985); Robinson (1996); MacMaster (2004).

⁴⁸ Brewer (1979); Tajfel, Bundy, and Flament (1971); Turner (1978).

⁴⁹ Brewer and Brown (1998, 580).

⁵⁰ Durkheim (1912/2001); Bastian, Jetten, and Ferris (2014).

⁵¹ Campbell (1958); Wagner, Kronberger, and Seifert (2002); Schuman and Scott (1989); Brown, Touchton, and Whitford (2011); Schuman, Belli, and Bischooping (1997). Traumatic experiences are more influential than regular ones in enhancing pre-existing identities and creating new ones (Brewer 1996). For example, emotional and traumatic memories are found to spread deeper into networks because an individual is more likely to talk about an emotional experience than a regular one with other group members (Berger and Milkman 2012; Harber and Cohen 2005; Sperber and Hirschfeld 2004).

among opposition groups by influencing processes of group differentiation. Social identity theory holds that individuals constantly seek to maximize differences between their in-group and the out-group in order to reduce cognitive dissonance, and strengthened in-group identity necessarily induces comparatively higher levels of group differentiation.⁵² The process of group differentiation occurs through in-group favoritism, where group members exaggerate intergroup differences and emphasize intragroup similarities.⁵³ Groups highlight their defining shared features and attitudes in contrast to those of the out-group, prioritizing characteristics that are more central for the definition of group identity and downplaying more peripheral traits.⁵⁴ Group differentiation is exacerbated by situations in which in-group identity is primed through differential treatment or experiences, such as combative situations, when groups are pitted against each other in conflict, or situations of relative deprivation, when a group is disproportionately discriminated against by a third party.⁵⁵ The stronger levels of group identification resulting from these situations lead to higher levels of group differentiation.

Processes of group differentiation cause individuals to become more extreme on in-group attitudes and preferences.⁵⁶ With groups based on ascriptive characteristics such as ethnicity or gender, the emphasized difference may be a shared physical feature, and preferences change with regards to in-group-favoring policies. However, in political groups formed on the basis of common political ideologies, policy preferences related to group ideology and goals are the group's defining characteristic and thus becomes the characteristic on which groups differentiate themselves when the strength of in-group identification increases. For example, processes of group differentiation "create a bipolar partisanship where individuals characterize the political parties into us and them and exaggerate perceived differences," manifested in social distance and differences in policy preferences across groups.⁵⁷ The resulting political polarization – including differences both in affect and in preferences – is then an indication of political distance between groups.

To explicitly relate these psychological processes to the question under analysis here, the comparatively decreased in-group identification resulting from widespread experiences of repression leads groups to recategorize boundaries, identifying less with their individual group and more with a larger collective of opposition groups. By perceiving themselves as part of a larger collective of opposition groups, parties do not differentiate between themselves, feel more positively about out-groups they previously considered negatively, and converge on certain defining policy preferences. In contrast, the increased in-group identification resulting from targeted repression activates processes of group differentiation, in which the targeted group distances itself from oth-

⁵² Tajfel and Turner (1986); Brewer and Brown (1998).

⁵³ Brewer and Brown (1998, 58).

⁵⁴ Kelly (1989); Simon (1992); Hogg and Turner (1987).

⁵⁵ Horwitz and Rabbie (1982).

⁵⁶ Mackie (1986); Ng and Wilson (1989).

⁵⁷ Greene (2004).

ers as in-group identity increases. Increasing the strength of in-group identification increases the distance in affect and preferences between groups.

Research Design

Why Tunis?

While a laboratory is a controlled environment, the broader cultural and social context is important to make experiments believable for the participants. I chose Tunis, Tunisia, as the country site for the experiments because it is a context in which the content of repressive primes is both relevant and realistic. Primes about repression should be expected to be most believable in a context where politically-motivated repression has previously been employed by the state. In Tunisia, respondents were likely to have real-world reference points for political repression because of the country's long and widespread experience with it under its two previous authoritarian presidents. Although state repression has significantly decreased since the 2011 uprisings unseated long-ruling president Ben 'Ali and destabilized the authoritarian state, it remains a salient political topic. In 2013, Tunisia's Transitional Justice Law established the Truth and Dignity Commission to document past abuses by the state, to provide reparations to victims, and to pursue criminal accountability for serious and systematic crimes. By the end of its mandate in June 2016, the commission had received 62,544 complaints and had held listening sessions to collect additional information for nearly 27,000 files, documenting the ubiquity of repressive experiences among Tunisian citizens. Local press closely follows reports and statements issued by the organization, and public hearings of select testimony were broadcast on national television. Even after regime change, activists remain concerned that the state might revert to past repressive behavior. In November 2015, current Tunisian president Beji Caid Essebsi instituted a state of emergency after a suicide bomber affiliated with the terrorist organization known as the Islamic State targeted the presidential palace and killed 12 presidential guards. Officials have renewed the law twice, in March 2016 and in June 2016, citing on-going terror threats against the state. Local and international human rights organizations have recorded the government's "disproportionate and repressive use" of the emergency law to "trample on human rights."⁵⁸ They cite arbitrary arrests, detentions, violations of civil liberties, and other discriminatory measures against journalists and political activists, and note how similar these actions are to the repressive behavior of the regime during the past authoritarian era.

Recruitment Procedure

To conduct the experiments, I worked in partnership with One-to-One for Research and Polling, an independent research company based in Tunis, Tunisia. A team of One-to-One staff translated the instrument into Tunisian Arabic. The lab experiments were conducted with a sample

⁵⁸ See Amnesty International's June 2016 report, titled "Tunisia: Severe restrictions on liberty and movement latest symptoms of repressive emergency law."

of 434 Tunisian adult citizens between May 13-20, 2016.⁵⁹ Because I believe the theory outlined above to be a generalizable process due to its robustness in social psychology, “ordinary” Tunisians were recruited instead of politicians for logistical and ethical reasons. The first 10 sessions ($n = 49$ respondents) were conducted at a small conference hall rented by my partner firm at the Yadis Ibn Khaldoun hotel, located at 30 Rue Kuwait in the Lafayette neighborhood of Tunis. Due to an unforeseen scheduling issue, the remaining 79 sessions ($n = 385$ respondents) were conducted at a rented space located at 9 Avenue de Madrid in the Bab el-Khadra neighborhood of Tunis. The space is situated close to the *Place de la République* train station, commonly known as *Le Passage*, a busy central station on Avenue de la Liberté.⁶⁰ Experiments were conducted between 8:30 am and 7:30 pm in order to recruit a diverse group of Tunisians passing through the busy neighborhood.

A rotating, mixed-gender team of four enumerators positioned themselves outside of the space to recruit participants. Recruited individuals were asked if they were willing to spend roughly 30 minutes completing an exercise about Tunisian society and were required to be over 18 years old to participate. Potential participants were not told that they would be compensated for their time. A session began when five respondents had been recruited. Each respondent was paired with an enumerator who read the instrument to the respondent and filled out her answers on a tablet.

Organization of Experiment

Respondents were first asked a number of questions recording basic demographic information, basic policy preferences, previous political behavior, and current real-world group membership. Next, respondents were told they had been assigned to a group based on their previous answers. All respondents were assigned to a fictitious group called “The Tunisian Organization for Social Dignity,” but whether this group was composed of members with similar opinions regarding economic policies or regarding policies related to religion and politics was randomized. In addition to learning their group assignment, respondents were also told about a peer group, “The Tunisian Forum for Freedom and Social Justice.”⁶¹ The below text was read to each respondent, and the bracketed text was randomized across participants:

Since 2011, many organizations working on political issues have been created. Based on your answers to the previous questions, you have been assigned to The Tunisian Organization for Social Dignity with other individuals who have the same opinions and ideas as you do in terms of [policies pertaining to matters of religion and politics / policies pertaining to economic matters]. The group

⁵⁹ No sessions were run on May 14 or May 15, as these days fell on the weekend.

⁶⁰ The location of each respondent’s session was controlled for in analyses and was not found to have any significant influence on the results.

⁶¹ These group names were chosen to represent a generic name similar to those used by organizations that have formed during the liberalized period following the 2011 revolution. Similar types of names invoking themes of social justice and political equality are used by groups that mobilize on a number of political, social, and economic causes, and which are both secular and Islamist in their orientation.

holds events, debates, and conferences about political and social issues affecting Tunisians on [matters of religion and politics /economic matters]. In addition, the group mobilizes its members to demonstrate for causes the group supports.

Your group, The Tunisian Organization for Social Dignity, is a very popular one and membership is highly exclusive. It has a number of peer organizations including The Tunisian Forum for Freedom and Social Justice, which runs similar events but whose members hold different opinions about [religion and politics policies/economic policies] from yours.

Please keep your membership in The Tunisian Organization for Social Dignity group in mind as you proceed with the tasks ahead of you.

The group names were chosen to represent a generic name similar to those used by organizations which have formed in Tunisia during the period of liberalization following the 2011 revolution. Similar names, invoking themes of social justice and political equality, have been used by groups that mobilize on a number of political, social, and economic causes, and which are both secular and Islamist in their orientation. To the best of my knowledge, these two specific names were not in use at the time.

This set up of the experiment requires two points of clarification. First, I chose to use a meaningful characteristic – common preferences – as the basis for group membership rather than generic identifiers alone, such as Groups A and B or Teams Red and Blue, as sometimes employed in the minimal group paradigm (Tajfel, Bundy, and Flament 1971). Countless studies have demonstrated that individuals do meaningfully identify with randomly-assigned and contentless groups in lab experimental settings; however, it was unclear to me what individuals' group-related preferences would be in these situations beyond simple material group interests, or how these preferences might be altered or updated. Assigning membership to a group with more content than the typical minimal group was intended to capture movement in political opinions related to that group membership later in the experiment.

Second, I assigned respondents to one of two types of groups: one based on economic policy preferences, or one based on policy preferences related to religion and politics. The use of two types of group was a deliberate choice to determine whether group membership defined by similar preferences regarding religion and politics are different or whether group members were affected differently by repressive conditions than members of economic-preference based groups. Lipset and Rokkan (1967, 94) observed that “systems will come under much heavier strain if the main lines of cleavage are over morals and the nature of human destiny than if they concern such mundane and negotiable matters as the prices of commodities, the rights of debtors and creditors, wages and profits, and the ownership of property.” Their observation suggests that differences over certain

preferences, especially those related to economics and tangible material trade-offs, may be more malleable or easier to find compromise over than philosophical differences with less clear, concrete solutions. However, because the same patterns emerged from initial analyses of both types of groups, I pool data from the two group assignments in the body of the paper.⁶²

Respondents then completed a priming task in which they were asked to brainstorm about the group to which they were assigned. This task was intended to increase the salience of this group in each respondent's mind before continuing with the experiment. Respondents were asked to describe the policies, slogans, activities, and other members of the group to the enumerator. The answers to the priming questions are beyond the scope of this paper, but demonstrated that respondents understood their group assignment, found it believable, and could construct a group narrative consistent with their assignment.

Next, respondents were randomly assigned to one of three repressive treatments: one of which served as an active control, a second which primed a widespread repressive environment, or a third which primed a targeted repressive environment against the respondent's assigned group. The treatment assignment occurred through informational primes, which included facts about the emergency law currently in place in Tunisia, and varied only in terms of the policies' targets. The control text below was read to all participants, while the widespread and targeted treatment groups received a second paragraph of information as follows:

CONTROL: As you may know, the Tunisian government extended the state of emergency for three months on March 22, 2016. The emergency measure allows the government to ban any type of strike or gathering. However, over the past few months, various groups have been involved in organizing events to denounce terrorism and participating in strikes demanding security and protection in the country.

WIDESPREAD: Control text + The police claim that the events violate the terms of the state of emergency, and are placing all groups, including your group, The Tunisian Organization for Social Dignity, as well as The Tunisian Forum for Freedom and Social Justice, under investigation to determine whether they have been involved in planning or participating in these events. Until the investigation is concluded, the groups will not be able to hold meetings or host events, and members will be put under surveillance. The police maintain the right to arrest group members pending the results of the investigation.

TARGETED: Control text + The police claim that the events violate the terms of the state of emergency, and are placing your group, The Tunisian Organization for Social Dignity, under investigation to determine whether it has been involved in planning or participating in these events. Until the investigation

⁶² Similar results hold for each individual group as well. Results available by request from the author.

is concluded, the group will not be able to hold meetings or host events, and members will be put under surveillance. The police maintain the right to arrest group members pending the results of the investigation.

Outcome Variables

In order to test my two-stage theory, I measured in- and out-group identification, and affective and preference polarization, in questions following the repressive condition assignment. To measure in-group identification, respondents were asked six questions about the strength of their identification with the group to which they had been assigned. These questions were adapted from a battery of social identity questions known as the Identification with a Psychological Group (IDPG) scale.⁶³ This is a standard battery used for determining individuals' level of identification with a number of social and political groups.⁶⁴ The question read, "I'd like to ask you a few questions about your feelings about other members of and your membership in the Tunisian Organization for Social Dignity. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is "absolutely disagree" and 10 is "absolutely agree," to what extent do you agree with the following statements?"

1. When someone criticizes the Tunisian Organization for Social Dignity, it feels like a personal insult.
2. I am very interested in what others think about the Tunisian Organization for Social Dignity.
3. When I talk about the Tunisian Organization for Social Dignity, I would usually say 'we' rather than 'they.'
4. The Tunisian Organization for Social Dignity's successes are my successes.
5. When someone praises the Tunisian Organization for Social Dignity, it feels like a personal compliment.
6. If a story in the media criticized The Tunisian Organization for Social Dignity, I would feel embarrassed.

Respondents were asked the same questions about the Tunisian Forum for Freedom and Social Justice, their out-group. Recorded responses to the questions loaded onto one factor (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$ for the in-group questions and $.69$ for the out-group questions, using responses only from the control [i.e. non-treated] group), and thus were summed and rescaled to range between 0 to 100 for ease of interpretation.

To measure affective polarization, respondents were asked three questions about members of the Tunisian Forum for Freedom and Justice, the out-group to which they had not been assigned. These questions were designed to capture their feelings towards the out-group with regards to trust, empathy, and cooperation. The question read, "I'd like to ask you a few questions about your

⁶³ Mael and Tetrick (1989).

⁶⁴ Brewer and Silver (2000).

feelings about the other social organization we mentioned before but to which you do not belong, the Tunisian Forum for Freedom and Social Justice. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is “absolutely disagree” and 10 is “absolutely agree,” to what extent do you agree with the following statements?”

1. How much do you trust members of the Tunisian Forum for Freedom and Social Justice?
2. How much do you empathize with members of the Tunisian Forum for Freedom and Social Justice?
3. How willing would you be to cooperate with members of the Tunisian Forum for Freedom and Social Justice?

Recorded responses to the questions loaded onto one factor (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .76$, using responses only from the control group), and thus were summed and rescaled to range between 0 to 100 for ease of interpretation. They were also analyzed separately.

To measure preference polarization, respondents were asked their opinions on a number of policies, but were told the average opinion of the other group *before* reporting their level of agreement. The questions posed to respondents varied based on their group assignment. Respondents who were assigned to a group with people of similar opinions on economic policies received the following three questions:

1. The government should privatize more public companies, like SONEDE and STEG.⁶⁵ For comparison, the average member of the other group, The Tunisian Forum for Freedom and Social Justice, answered 7.
2. The government should impose both a wage cap as well as a minimum wage to ensure equality of income. For comparison, the average member of the other group, The Tunisian Forum for Freedom and Social Justice, answered 3.
3. The government should increase taxes on the wealthy in order to increase spending on social welfare programs. For comparison, the average member of the other group, The Tunisian Forum for Freedom and Social Justice, answered 5.

Meanwhile, respondents who were assigned to a group of people with similar opinions on policies related to religion and politics received the following three questions:

1. The Tunisian government should prioritize legislation that preserves the Islamic heritage of the state. For comparison, the average member of the other group, The Tunisian Forum for Freedom and Social Justice, answered 7.

⁶⁵ SONEDE stands for *Société Nationale d’Exploitation et de Distribution des Eaux*, a national water supply authority founded in 1968 under the supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture. STEG is the Tunisian Company of Electricity and Gas (*Société Tunisienne de l’Electricité et du Gaz*) is a public electric company founded in 1962.

2. The parliament should enact personal status laws according to Islamic law. For comparison, the average member of the other group, The Tunisian Forum for Freedom and Social Justice, answered 3.
3. The government should mandate the separation of religion from politics. For comparison, the average member of the other group, The Tunisian Forum for Freedom and Social Justice, answered 5.

Principal component analysis revealed that the three questions asked in each of the group assignments loaded onto one factor. I pool results across the three questions for each type of group, constructing a dependent variable measuring the respondent's average distance from the out-group's position across the three questions.⁶⁶

Hypotheses

I posited earlier a two-stage psychological process through which repression influences processes of polarization, which leads to four hypotheses to be tested by the experiment. The first two hypotheses concern the relationship between the repressive treatment group and distance from the out-group, measured by questions capturing both affective and preference polarization. The last two hypotheses speak to the centrality of group identification as the mechanism through which different repressive environments alter levels of polarization per the theory. My hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis 1a (affective polarization): *Lower* levels of positive feelings towards the out-group will be observed in the *targeted* treatment group, while *higher* level of positive feelings towards the out-group will be observed in the *widespread* treatment group.

Hypothesis 1b (preference polarization): *Larger* distances from the stated preferences from the out-group will be observed in the *targeted* treatment group, while *smaller* distance from the stated preferences from the out-group will be observed in the *widespread* treatment group.

Hypothesis 2a (in-group identification): Primes of repressive environments will result in a *higher* level of in-group identification in the *targeted* treatment group, and *lower* level of in-group identification in the *widespread* treatment group.

Hypothesis 2b (out-group identification): Primes of repressive environments will result in a *lower* level of out-group identification in the *targeted* treatment group, and a *higher* level in the *widespread* treatment group.

⁶⁶ Because the internal reliability was not remarkably high for these indexes (Chronbach's $\alpha = .44$ for the economic questions; Chronbach's $\alpha = .63$ for the religious questions), I also run separate regressions disaggregating the three components into separate variables, and the same pattern holds. Results available by request from the author.

Results

Observed values support hypotheses 1a and 1b: priming a widespread repressive environments fosters less polarization, or distance from the out-group in either affect or policy preferences, than priming the control and targeted repressive environments. In terms of affective polarization, figure 1 displays the average levels of positive affect towards the out-group, as measured by the three-item index, across treatment groups. Positive affect towards the out-group is highest in the widespread treatment group; while this is not significantly different from the control ($p = .12$), it is in the expected direction. On a scale of 1 to 100, the control group reported an average of 62.79 on the out-group affect index, the widespread treatment group reported an average of 67.19, and the targeted treatment group reported an average of 61.85. The difference in positive affect towards the out-group is significant between the widespread and targeted treatment ($p = .05$).

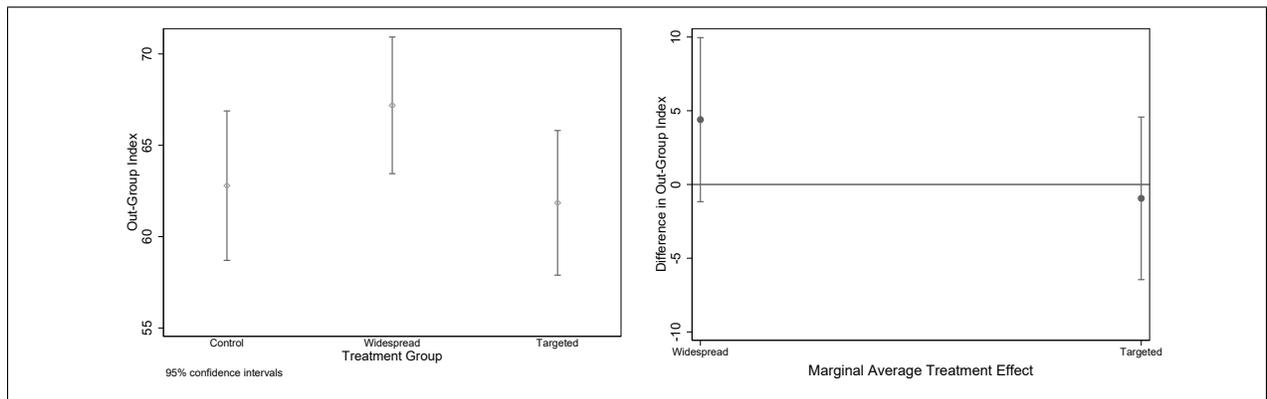


Figure 1: Positive Affect towards Out-Group by Treatment Group

In terms of preference polarization, figure 2 displays the average distance from the out-group's preferences and the marginal treatment effect by treatment group.⁶⁷ The widespread treatment group is closest to the out-group, and significantly more so than not only the targeted treatment group but also the control. The control was an average of 70.72 percent of the total distance away from the out-group, while the widespread treatment group was an average of 55.2 percent and the targeted treatment group an average of 76.7 percent.

⁶⁷ This measurement has been standardized to represent observed distance as a percentage of total possible distance.

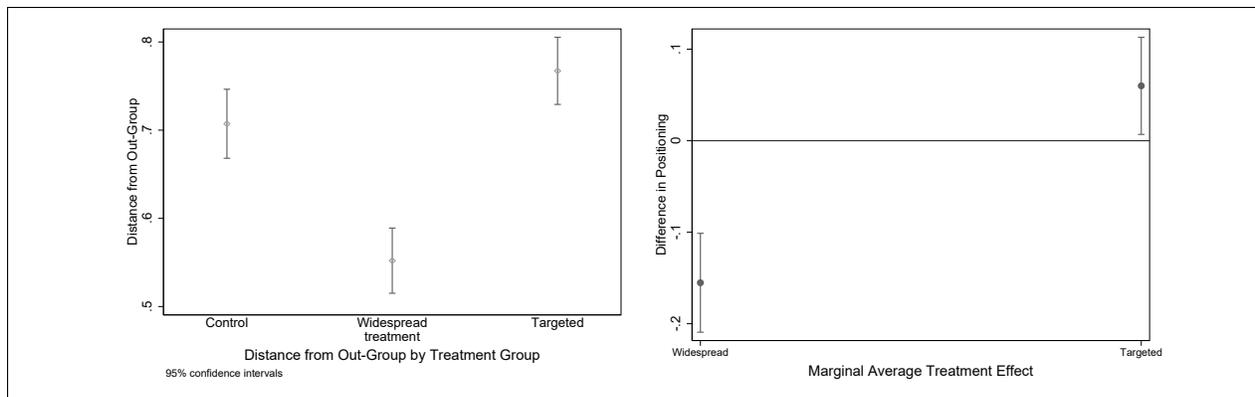


Figure 2: Distance from Out-Group Preferences by Treatment Group

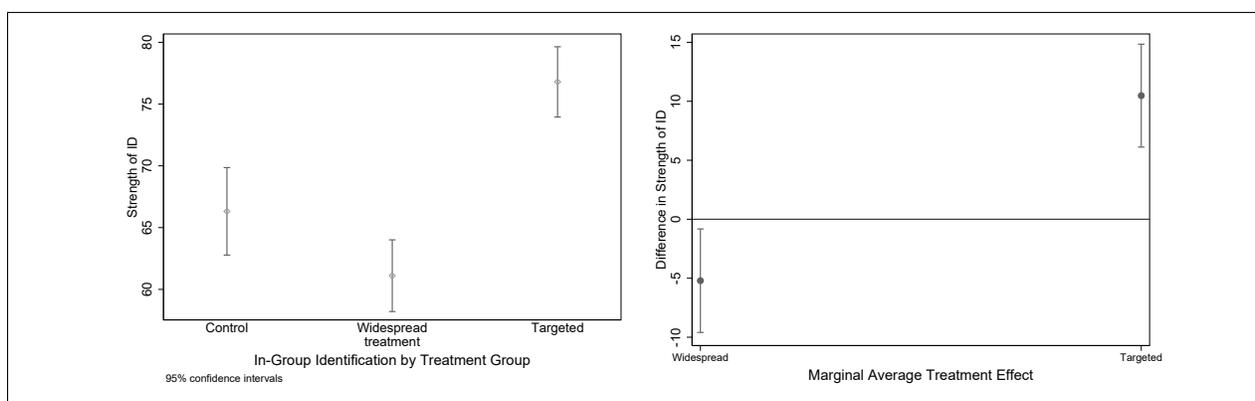


Figure 3: In-Group Identification by Treatment Group

In addition, observed values support hypothesis 2a: in-group identification is significantly lower in the widespread treatment condition and significantly higher in the targeted treatment condition when compared with the control, as demonstrated in figure 3. Respondents in the control, widespread, and targeted treatment groups reported average levels of in-group identification of 66.3, 61.11, and 76.79, respectively, on a scale of 0 to 100. Similarly, observed values provide some support for hypothesis 2b: out-group identification is lower in the targeted treatment group condition ($p = .06$), though the widespread treatment group is not statistically different from the control (see figure 4). Respondents in the control, widespread, and targeted treatment groups reported average levels of out-group identification of 55.54, 57.05, and 49.74 respectively, on a scale of 10 to 100.

Polarization and Group Identification: Further Mechanism Tests

Descriptive results demonstrate that treatment assignment predicts levels of in-group identification and levels of polarization as expected. However, beyond simple observable differences by primed repressive environment, I posit that repression alters level of polarization *through* shifts

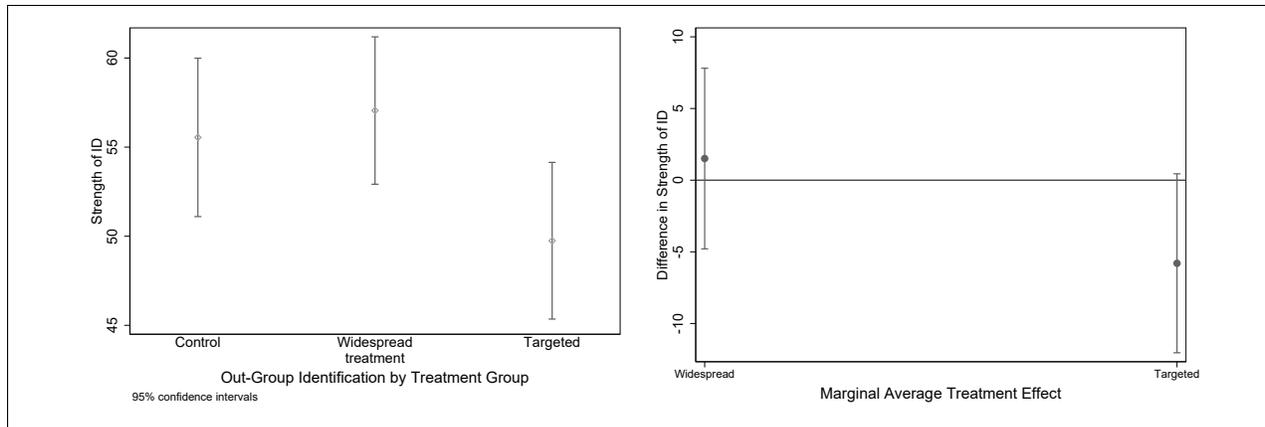


Figure 4: Out-Group Identification by Treatment Group

in group identification. Correlations presented below demonstrate that the relationships are in the predicted direction. There is a negative relationship between in-group identification and positive feelings towards the out-group, while there is a significant and positive relationship between out-group identification and positive feelings towards the out-group (see table 2). Regression results also demonstrate that there is a significant and positive relationship between higher levels of in-group identification and distance from the stated position of the out-group, and also a significant negative relationship between out-group identification and distance. Similar patterns hold in models with and without covariates (see table 3).

I conduct an additional analysis to test whether increased in-group identification may plausibly mediate the relationship between repressive environment and polarization per the mechanism outlined in my theory. Here, the independent variable is treatment assignment, the mediator is group identification, and the dependent variable is average affective or preference distance the out-group. Again, the treatments are not significant for out-group feelings, but the relationship is in the expected direction (see table 4). Out-group identification is a strong predictor of out-group feelings and also reduces the size of the effect for the widespread treatment. When difference in preferences of the out-group is the dependent variable, in-group identification slightly mediates the effect of both treatments, as does out-group identification (see table 5). The size of the treatment effect decreases for the widespread treatments, and the significance of the treatment effect of the targeted prime loses significance and magnitude, when in-group identification is added to the regression. The full results are available in the article's appendix.

Repression and Polarization in Egypt (1981-2011) and Tunisia (1987-2010)

The results produced by this study document the psychological mechanism which link the phenomena of repression and polarization. The above design is a hard test of the theory, using randomly assigned fictional groups and plausible yet subtle priming in an artificial lab environment. The results consistently suggest that repressive primes alter individuals' relative positioning with regards to the preferences of an out-group, and condition levels of polarization more generally, through the mechanism of in-group identification. Moreover, in-group identification significantly mediates the effect of the treatment groups on distance from an out-group's position, most significantly so for the targeted repression treatment.

If extremely subtle priming of repressive environments against fictional groups, lasting only a few minutes and comprising a few lines of text, was able to create these effects, it is plausible that similar effects should occur in much greater magnitude when repression physically and psychologically affects individuals over the course of multiple years and even decades, and when these state-inflicted traumas target groups about which members care much more and to which they more strongly relate. The same mechanism is suggested by two historical examples of authoritarian regimes in which the state repressed opposition groups differently, and which resulted in different levels of polarization among non-regime political groups at the moment of transition. Egypt serves as a case of targeted repression under authoritarian president Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011), while Tunisia serves as a case of widespread repression of opposition under Zine el-'Abidine Ben 'Ali (1987-2011). While historical shifts in group identification are difficult to measure after they occur and outside a lab setting, given that these are internal cognitive processes, we can observe the nature of the repression to which groups are subjected, and measure changes in affective and preference polarization, in these two real world cases, lending additional credence to the experimental results above.

Variation in Repression

Tunisia and Egypt were both estimated to have 30,000 political prisoners under Mubarak and Ben 'Ali, respectively.⁶⁸ While these numbers suggest similarities between the countries, a closer look at the demographics of these political prisoner populations, and the extent to which repressive experiences were shared across political opposition groups, reveal different repressive environments in each country.

In Tunisia, repression was a ubiquitous experience for the regime's active political opposi-

⁶⁸ See Holder (1994) and Khalil (2014). These numbers were also confirmed to me in interviews with former political prisoners, activists, and members of human rights organizations, though individuals were quick to mention that this figure was based on commonly accepted knowledge and did not rely on firm documentation.

tion under authoritarian president Ben ‘Ali. Upon seizing power in a bloodless coup on November 7, 1987, Ben ‘Ali promised a number of democratic reforms and released thousands of political prisoners in December 1987. However, soon the regime’s repression of opposition came in overlapping waves. First, after strong showing in the 1989 parliamentary elections, and two contentious events likely fabricated by the regime,⁶⁹ Islamist opposition group Ennahda becoming the first targets of regime repression under the new president. Roughly 8,000 of the Ennahda’s top and middle leadership were arrested between 1990 and 1992. 279 members were tried in two cases in Tunisia’s military tribunal, with 46 individuals receiving life sentences and 219 receiving between one and 24 years in prison.⁷⁰ Next, the regime expanded its target to leftist parties. Leaders from from the Tunisian Ba’athist Movement were arrested after the second Gulf War (al-Madini 2012, 63), and leaders of the Tunisian Communist Workers Party (*Hizb al-‘Umāl ash-Shyu‘ī et-Tunsi*, known by the acronym PCOT) were regularly arrested between 1991 and 2002. During a third wave of regime repression, leaders of center-left Ettakatol and *Congrès pour la République (al-Mu’tamar min ‘ajl el-Jumhuriyya*, known as CPR) increasingly faced repression in the late 1990s. Even legalized opposition was not immune from repression; in 1995, two leaders from the *Mouvement des Démocrates Socialistes (MDS)* were sentenced to years in prison for an open letter criticizing the president’s behavior and the political environment he was creating.

In contrast, the Mubarak regime employed a targeted repressive environment against its opposition. Between 1981 and 2010, the regime overwhelmingly repressed the Brotherhood while it permitted leftist organizations to exist and coopted center secular parties, all to varying degrees of success.⁷¹ The targeted repression against the Brotherhood was visible in the differential treatment to which the organization was subjected. First, the sheer number of Brotherhood arrests was staggering. Internal Brotherhood statistics recorded roughly 100,000 arrests carried out against the 30,000 members of the group, averaging roughly three arrests per active member, during the last decade of Mubarak’s rule.⁷³ Second, state repression targeted the organization through waves of regular arrests as the Brotherhood increasingly demonstrated its ability to challenge the regime in parliament, in the country’s strong professional associations and syndicates, and in the streets (Abed-Kotob 1995). These arrests occurred both in response to Brotherhood-organized mass mo-

⁶⁹ The regime slowly began to arrest individual members of Ennahda in the weeks after the elections, but waited until 1991 to initiate a major campaign in the wake of two incidents. First, armed militants from a *jihādī* group attacked the Bab Souika ruling party headquarters. The group was not affiliated with Ennahda, but the regime denounced Ennahda’s condemnation of the attack as lukewarm (Ritter 2015, 116). In the same year, the regime announced that it had thwarted a coup-plotting scheme between members of the military and Ennahda, which became known as the Baraket Essahel affair after the town in which meetings allegedly took place. Both appear to have either been fabricated or exaggerated by the regime to justify the crackdown.

⁷⁰ See Human Rights Watch, Human Rights Watch World Report 1993 - Tunisia, 1 January 1993, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/467fca77c.html> [accessed 4 January 2016].

⁷¹ Others have similarly referred to the system as a “divided structure of contestation”⁷² wherein some parties were permitted to operate and participate in electoral contests, while others were excluded.

⁷³ Husayn al-Qazzaz, Muslim Brotherhood advisor and confidant of Brotherhood financier Khairat el-Shater. Interview with the author, June 15, 2016, Istanbul, Turkey.

bilization.⁷⁴ as well as randomly, to collect information on the organization.⁷⁵ In addition, the regime’s targeted repression against the Brotherhood was most evident in close proximity to national parliamentary elections, which were scheduled at five-year intervals. The regime arrested thousands of Islamist campaign workers, supporters, and candidates in the periods surrounding these contests.⁷⁶ Finally, the targeted nature of repression against the Brotherhood was also evident in the regime’s legal strategy. Beginning in 1995, the government referred and sentenced a large number of Brotherhood leaders to military tribunals in three major cases in 1995, 2000, and 2006. In these tribunals, typical judgments included three-, five-, seven-, and ten-year sentences, and often included hard labor. The legal approach was notable because the regime had not used this tactic against political opposition since 1965 under Nasser, and also did not use the same protocol for secular opposition leaders arrested during the same time period.⁷⁷

Table 1: Repression in Tunisia and Egypt

<p>Tunisia, 1987-2010 Widespread Repression</p> <p><i>Similar treatment across groups</i></p>	<p>~30,000 political prisoners Distinctive waves against opposition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1981-1991: Islamists • 1991-2002: Leftist parties • 1997-2005: Center-left parties, personal rivals
<p>Egypt, 1981-2011 Targeted Repression</p> <p><i>Different treatment across groups</i></p>	<p>~30,000 political prisoners Targeted waves against Muslim Brotherhood</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1995 • 2000 • 2005 • 2010

Variation in Affective and Preference Polarization

As the number and variety of Tunisian opposition groups repressed increased, these experiences became increasingly ubiquitous among the Tunisian opposition. The shared trauma of widespread repression was an experience in which individuals’ identification with their immediate opposition groups was not primed or made more salient, and through which individual groups

⁷⁴ Campagna (1996).

⁷⁵ The most well known incident was the *Salsabīl* affair. In February 1992, security forces raided the offices of the computer company by the same name owned by prominent Muslim Brotherhood members, including Khairat el-Shater and Hassan Malek. The information obtained during the raid was later used to arrest 11 leaders in December of the same year.

⁷⁶ Wickham (2013).

⁷⁷ For additional information, see Campagna (1996), Wickham (2002, 215); Al-Awadi (2004), el Ghobashy (2005, 373), International Crisis Group (2008).

came to identify with a larger collective of active opposition. As the Ennahda members and leadership began to be slowly released from prison in November 1999, rejoining the general population,⁷⁸ and as repression affected a younger generation of leftist and secular opposition groups, repression became an increasingly a shared experience that bridged and decreased ideological divides across the opposition. The opposition's collective experience of repression does the work of significantly decreasing polarization among these groups by altering levels of in-group identification.

The way opposition members described their feelings towards other opposition groups in the late 1980s reveals both a lack of collective identification (i.e. as a unified opposition movement) and negative feelings towards competing groups. At that time, most secular opposition groups maintained that political Islam was inherently in contradiction to democracy, and that religion had no place in Tunisian politics.⁷⁹ As a result, these groups supported the Ben 'Ali regime's denial of Ennahda's right to participate in the democratic process, and they displayed high levels of animosity toward the Islamist opposition.⁸⁰ Nahdawi narratives of the 1989-1992 period document the widespread belief that secular opposition members had either tacitly or explicitly supported repression against them. Samir Dilou, jailed for 10 years as a leader of the *Union Générale des Etudiants de Tunisie* and a member of the Ennahda Executive Committee, reflected that "the other opposition parties were silent or conspired with the regime" during the crackdown.⁸¹

However, as state repression broadened its scope, positive affect developed among competing opposition groups. As early as 1991, the secularist Harakat Tahrir came to regard themselves and Ennahda as being "in one trench," because repression now targeted anyone demanding democratic reforms.⁸² As some members of the ruling RCD were affected, even they began to demonstrate more positive affect towards Islamists. For example, Mohamed Mzali was the Secretary General of the ruling party and had served as Prime Minister under Bourguiba between 1980 and 1986. When the regime targeted him in the late 1980s as a scapegoat for pervasive economic troubles,⁸³ he fled to exile in France. Just a few years later, in 1991, Mzali described Islamist ideas as "legiti-

⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch reported that hundreds of prisoners, including sympathizers or low-ranking members of Ennahda and 10 identified as PCOT members, were released by the Ben 'Ali regime ahead of meetings with the European Union's Council of Ministers in Brussels, scheduled within a framework of the U.S.-Tunisian Association Agreement. The release of Ennahda leadership followed in the 2000s.

⁷⁹ al-Madini (2012, 260).

⁸⁰ Haugbolle and Cavatorta (2011, 334).

⁸¹ Interview with the author, November 17, 2014, Tunis, Tunisia.

⁸² al-Madini (2012, 105).

⁸³ As the country witnessed strikes and riots related to price increases at the end of the Bourguiba regime, the president laid the blame on Mzali, dismissed him from the ruling party and replaced him as Prime Minister with Rachif Sfar, previously the Minister of Finance. Mzali left the country for France, and was sentenced *in absentia* to four years imprisonment and 15 years hard labor in a politically charged case against him. In 1991, he published his own account of his ordeal under Bourguiba and accused Ben Ali of being just as dictatorial as his predecessor. In that book, he spoke highly of Ennahda. Later, Mzali and Ennahda, along with former Bourguiba-era minister and PUP founder Ahmed Ben Salah exiled under Ben Ali in 1989, jointly issued a statement that criticized Ben Ali and called for a national alliance against him later that year, and a similar declaration in 1995 (Murphy 2016, 217).

mate in a country whose inhabitants are Muslim” and categorized Ennahda as consisting, “for the most part, of men of honor, pacifists and democrats.”⁸⁴ As early as 1994, upon being released from prison into exile in France, CPR co-founder Moncef Marzouki reached out to Ennahda leadership to coordinate their opposition activities. After his traumatic experience during the same year’s presidential elections, he appealed to Tunisians to “forget about the divide between secularists and Islamists, and instead focus on the divide between democrats and non-democrats.”⁸⁵ His statement reflected a newfound empathy for Ennahda, which Marzouki now considered “democrats,” and demonstrated positive affect between the secularist and Islamist opposition.

Moreover, the jailed leadership of Ennahda emerged from prison identifying more strongly with the broader opposition movement. They embraced collective causes like human rights and expressed positive affect toward other political groups. Experiencing tremendous repression in an atmosphere of collective suffering appears to have strengthened the commitment of Ennahda leadership to issues of human rights. Reflecting on 16 years imprisonment, Ennahda’s Secretary General Hamadi Jebali said, “If you were to ask me, ‘Hamadi, were you broken by this [experience]?’ I would say no. My suffering made me more convinced of the importance of human rights, political liberties, and the democratic project.”⁸⁶ In a 2009 interview, Sadok Chourou reflected on what the suffering of the group had meant for its political vision. He said, “during my time in prison, an-Nahda had decided that the goal of its political work was to achieve a comprehensive and inclusive national reconciliation that restores political equilibrium and prevents a monopoly by any one party in deciding the fate of the country.” These statements illustrate a shift in the way Ennahda talked about their political identity, which was now firmly entrenched within a broader, collective opposition.

Party platforms, manifestos, and official statements issued by parties demonstrate convergence among the Tunisian opposition on central issues of state identity and the role of religion. Initially, parties’ platforms indicated a high level of division on policy preferences related to religion and politics. In 1989, secular parties supported a ban, proposed by the regime, on all religion-based parties as part of their larger commitment to a secular public sphere. However, by 2011, parties’ platforms had come to reflect changes in the distribution of policy preferences regarding religion and politics. The convergence came from centrist preference shifts by both Islamist and secular opposition groups. Preference change occurred over the state’s role in enforcing a combination or, conversely, a separation of religion and politics and over the protection of individual religious liberties. Ultimately, parties across the spectrum articulated a preference for the state to protect differences of opinion and religious practice in private spaces defended by the state, rather than enforcing a given version of Islamism or secularism on citizens’ behavior.

⁸⁴ Mzali (1991).

⁸⁵ As quoted in Wolf (2017, 101).

⁸⁶ Interview with the author, December 10, 2014, Sousse, Tunisia.

In addition, two major collaborative initiatives in the early 2000s solidified an agreement among opposition leaders about how religion and politics would be handled officially in a potential post-authoritarian era. The first initiative was the 2003 *Appel de Tunis* (“Call from Tunis”). In May 2003, 32 members of the Tunisian opposition met secretly in Aix-en-Provence, France, to negotiate an agreement and to offer a united front against the Ben ‘Ali regime. On June 17, 27 participants signed a pact resulting from the meeting, the first formal and public agreement between secular and Islamist opposition groups. The document underscored the freedom of religion, the neutrality of mosques, and a pro-Palestine and pan-Arab position as points of agreement among the opposition. The second initiative was the 2005 *Collectif du 18 October* (October 18th Collective), a semi-formal coordination between the opposition that persisted through the 2010 uprising. The Collectif was a joint effort by legal and illegal opposition groups, operating in Tunisia and in exile, to formulate a set of shared principles and reform demands around which to rally opposition to the Ben ‘Ali regime. The initiative drew its name from the day on which eight members of the opposition had announced a month-long hunger strike to protest state abuses related to freedom of expression and human rights. The content of the document issued by the Collectif in December mirrored many of the articles from the 2003 *Appel*, but expanded the diversity of parties and groups participating and agreeing for the first time to a single list of reform principles.⁸⁷ The 2005 document included an entire section titled “Relations between Religion and the State,” which focused on questions of religious freedom, national identity, and the state’s future role in institutionalizing these concepts. The document strikes a balance between the independence of religion from the state and the independence of the state from religion. The resulting vision is a democratic, “civil state grounded in republican principles and respect for human rights,” yet one which “must give special consideration to Islam... while avoiding any monopoly or any misuse of religion, as well as guaranteeing the right to practice any religion and belief in the effective implementation of religion and worship.”

In contrast, the concentration of physical and psychological repression within the Brotherhood cadres made this an experience in which in-group identification was primed, and the identity of the larger opposition became increasingly fractured between opposition groups that were coopted, tolerated, or targeted. Moreover, each group accused the other of working with the regime. As a result of opposition groups not identifying as a larger opposition movement, the political system shifted from one in which there was cooperation and consensus at the beginning of Mubarak’s regime, to one deeply divided over mutual enmity, conflicting identities, and disagreement over the role of religion in politics. At the advent of the Mubarak regime, the Brotherhood held positive affect towards competing groups, and felt connected to liberal and secular groups who were also mobilizing to oppose the regime. Brotherhood general guide Tilmisani recalled that the 1981 wave of arrests under Sadat had brought together individuals from many different schools of thought

⁸⁷ Jaafar (2014, 130-132)

and opinion, noting positively, “there were those among the Communists who prayed with us.”⁸⁸ Further, he saw identified a unified, collective opposition, responding to a question about the possibility of Islamic and leftist forces with “anyone who calls for freedom is my ally and I am his.” Tilmisani even went so far as to describe members of the opposition as “extremely charming,” referring directly to two prominent communists, Doctor Ismail Sabri Abdullah and Wafd Party leader Fuad Siraj Al-Din Pasha.⁸⁹

However, with the onset of targeted repression against the Muslim Brotherhood under the Mubarak regime in the 1990s, the Brotherhood experienced increasing in-group identification and decreasing identification with other groups. Targeted repression altered the group’s identity, and members increasingly identified as isolated, estranged from the broader opposition, and uniquely victimized. As a result, the Brotherhood’s collective affect towards secular opposition groups grew increasingly negative. A report titled, “The Muslim Brotherhood and Mubarak: From Appeasement to Confrontation,” is emblematic of this narrative.⁹⁰ The report accuses the regime of detaining tens of thousands of its members, levying seven military trials against the Brotherhood, and launching systematic media campaigns to undermine the group’s legitimacy, popularity, and success. The report claims that Mubarak used the organization as a “scarecrow,” but goes even further to claim that by the hand of the regime, “[the Brotherhood] has received consecutive blows and been subjected to the ugliest shades of injustice, abuse, and racism – like what happened in South Africa and America between those with white skin and [those with] black skin.” Similarly, in a 2011 interview, Brotherhood leader and financier El-Shater remarked that waves of repression against the group “resulted in a feeling of oppression and being tied down.”⁹¹

Moreover, the Brotherhood narrative drew a firm boundary between its members, who had suffered both for their specific cause and for the general cause of democracy, and members of other opposition groups, who had been coopted by the regime. Gamal Heshmat, a member of the Shura Council who served in parliament and was jailed under Mubarak, noted that leftist and liberal opposition to the regime “also opposed the Brotherhood... it even encouraged the security apparatus in its tyrannical goal. Liberals in Egypt only ever wore the garments of liberalism.”⁹² Amr Darrag, a member of the Brotherhood’s political organization from 2000-2006 and a founding member of the Freedom and Justice Party, similarly criticized secular opposition, particularly leftists: “those who were ‘performing’ opposition were not actually independent of the regime’s agenda. The opposition – particularly the leftist opposition – was cooperating with state security against us.”⁹³

⁸⁸ Al-Jumhuriyya 4 December 1982; al-Siyasa al-Kuwatiya 3 April 1986.

⁸⁹ Ramadan (1993, 172).

⁹⁰ Accessed on *Ikhwan Wiki*, an official website maintained by the Brotherhood with curated information about the organization.

⁹¹ Interview with Josh Stacher, March 24, 2011, Cairo, Egypt.

⁹² Interview with the author, June 18, 2016, Istanbul, Turkey.

⁹³ Interview with the author, June 13, 2016, Istanbul, Turkey.

At the same time, the Egyptian opposition became increasingly polarized on how to define the nature of the state regarding religion and politics. In the 1980s, the Brotherhood found common cause with secular opposition groups, even running on joint platforms. But by the 2011 uprising, the Brotherhood's preferences had hardened, calling for Islam to serve as the basis of legislation and for both state and religious institutions to actively advance their particular vision of Islamism. As early as 2000, the Brotherhood's platform articulated a collective preference for a stronger state role in enforcing the shari'a.⁹⁴ As Wickham (2013, 106) writes, from then on, "Islam and the 'fixed values of the nation' would hence serve as the ultimate reference point for the new political order, setting the outer limits of free expression and assembly." The platform also outlined preferences for state behavior, including "giving the proponents of the *da'wa* the freedom to explain the principles and characteristics of Islam, the most important of which is its comprehensiveness as a guide to all aspects of life," "encouraging people to worship and to abide by good and upright morals," and "purifying the media of everything which violates the rulings of Islam and established norms." All "freedoms" were couched in language providing space for individual religious practice, but simultaneously implied a strong role for the state in mandating specific religious behaviors.

Variation in Transition Outcomes

Levels of both affective and preference polarization among political groups in Egypt and Tunisia were critical to the democratic transitions initiated by the "Arab Spring" uprisings in 2011. Mass protests in Egypt and Tunisia were the first to produce major changes in government. Initially, the two countries' transitions followed similar paths. Egypt's Hosni Mubarak and Tunisia's Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali resigned the offices they had held for 30 and 24 years, respectively, after weeks of unrelenting protests. The presidents' resignations empowered a number of political groups, the vast majority of whom had previously mobilized as both legal and illegal (meaning, unrecognized by the government) opposition parties. Members of these groups were elected to national constituent assemblies within a year of the uprisings and were tasked with drafting new constitutions and putting in place the rules and timelines for legislative and presidential elections. In both countries, the religious-secular cleavage was the salient dimension of contestation in these first elections. Each country's leading Islamist party, influential opposition voices under the previous regime, won 37 percent of the vote.

However, within three years of their initial transitions, Egypt and Tunisia were in vastly different situations. In Egypt, tensions between political groups were palpable under a Muslim Brotherhood-dominated government. The Brotherhood-affiliated Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) won a plurality in the constituent assembly, and Mohamed Morsi, a former member of the group's

⁹⁴ The preferences indeed guided the organization for the next five years: they were reiterated nearly verbatim during a conference outlining the Brotherhood's reform initiative in March 2004.

Guidance Bureau, was elected president in June 2012. Morsi's critics accused him of heavy handedness and dictatorial instincts. Secular parties walked out of the December 2012 constitutional proceedings after significant disagreements over the text and content, leaving the FJP and its allies with significant control over the document. In June 2013, the Egyptian military seized on divisions among political groups and massive anti-Morsi protests on the first anniversary of his inauguration, and undertook a military coup on July 3. Members of the Brotherhood's rival political movements sat behind Army General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi as he announced the forced change in government. By year's end, the Brotherhood was banned from politics and named a terrorist organization, following a brutal regime crackdown on the organization and its supporters. The violent campaign peaked with the August 2013 massacre of pro-Brotherhood demonstrators in Cairo's al-Nahda and Rabaa al-Adawiya Squares, which left close to 1,400 dead and 16,000 detained.⁹⁵ By 2014, authoritarian relapse was well under way. In May, General el-Sisi was elected president in a typical authoritarian election, complete with opposition boycotts and a result of over 96% of votes cast in favor of the candidate.

Meanwhile in Tunisia, elections for the 217-seat National Constituent Assembly (NCA) were held on October 23, 2011. Former Islamist opposition party Ennahda placed first, but formed a coalition government, known as the Troika, with a formerly banned center-left opposition group CPR and a formerly legalized secular opposition group, Ettakatol. To streamline the constitution drafting process, six 22-person committees were formed and each was tasked with a principle component of the constitution. The makeup of each committee mirrored the distribution of power in the larger assembly, including Islamists, leftists, secularists, and independents. An inclusive constitution was passed in January 2014 with support from all major political groups. This was a major achievement in light of a number of false starts, difficult debates, and the terrifying assassinations of two leftist politicians, all of which contributed to extending the national constituent assembly's one-year mandate to a three-year period. Between October 2014 and January 2015, the country held its second post-authoritarian elections, its first for the permanent legislature and presidency. Next, Tunisia underwent its first ever transfer of power through the ballot box, when Islamist and former opposition party Ennahda lost to Nidaa Tounes, a new party encompassing many former regime members and united by an anti-Islamist platform. Despite a number of significant economic and security challenges, the country continues to progress towards democratic consolidation and held municipal elections in May 2018.

While there are other important differences between the cases, I highlight that Egypt and Tunisia faced starkly different levels of elite polarization during their transitions. In Tunisia, elites articulated a shared identity as an opposition, who had suffered together under the previous regime and who would collectively benefit from democratization. As a result, they were able to agree, through compromise, on the outlines of a political transition process and the identity of the re-

⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch (2014).

formed Tunisian state. Mustapha Ben Jaafar, a founder of Ettakatol and the President of the Constituent Assembly from 2011 to 2014, said “in my opinion, [October 18] was the pretext for when we [(meaning, the secular opposition)] discussed the constitution with the Islamists. We were already 97 or 96 percent in agreement.”⁹⁶ But perhaps most importantly, affect between the groups had changed dramatically from the late 1980s, as individuals of different ideological persuasions began to consider each other partners in resistance. Ben Jaffar continued,

those who suffered from tyranny have an awareness that we passed through a distinct moment, one we survived but that can't return. The subject of freedom – in all respects, without any constraints, now or ever – had become something that was not up for discussion. We worked together because we only had two choices: we could either return to what happened before the revolution, or we could move forward.

In contrast, high levels of affective and preference polarization quickly derailed the transition process in Egypt, enabling the resurgence of authoritarianism. Leftists and liberals described the Brotherhood after the 2011 uprising as “power hungry,” beginning with their support for early parliamentary elections, rather than amending the constitution through a coalition.⁹⁷ After dominating the elections, the Brotherhood felt it had received a mandate from the Egyptian people, and as a result, it had the right to dictate the course of the transition and the constitution drafting process. Leftists accused them of “not playing by the rules of the game,” as Ahmed Fawzi described. However, the fear of an Islamist dominated party was not simply based on the importance of fair and transparent procedures. More than this, leftist and secularists faced what Mohamed Gabr called an “existential fear.” Liberals called the Brotherhood’s vision for Egypt “totally contradictory with the Egyptian national character,”⁹⁸ which, they claimed, respected pluralism of religion and the secular division of religion and politics. As Karama’s Sayyid al-Toukhy described it, the Brotherhood “held the presidency and the majority in parliament, and then they took over the constitutional council. They tried to leave a religious imprint on the new state, but the revolution had called for a modern civil democratic state. The Brotherhood was against this idea.”⁹⁹

Beyond divergent preferences, affective polarization also contributed to the collapse of the Egyptian transition. High-ranking members of the Brotherhood explicitly tied the group’s unique identity of victimhood to a number of inward-facing and defensive behaviors, demonstrating the lack of identification between the Brotherhood and the broader opposition. Darrag said “part of the reason why some of the people in the Brotherhood were not capable of good communication is that they felt the others did not appreciate the kind of sacrifice [Brotherhood leaders] went through to

⁹⁶ Interview with the author, January 16, 2017, Tunis, Tunisia.

⁹⁷ Mohamed Gabr, co-founder of the *‘Adl* party. Interview with the author, February 10, 2018, Cairo, Egypt. Osama Ghazali Harb, co-founder of *al-Jabha*, described this sentiment with an Egyptian colloquialism, “*hamout fi power*.” Interview with the author, February 7, 2018, Cairo, Egypt.

⁹⁸ Amin Iskandar, co-founder of the Karama party. Interview with the author, February 3, 2018, Cairo, Egypt.

⁹⁹ Interview with the author, January 31, 2018, Cairo, Egypt.

maintain the protest movement” during this period. In these statements, the “others” were identified as non-Islamist members of the opposition, particularly those who were actively involved in parliament and might have benefited electorally from sidelining the Brotherhood. The organization’s narratives of a divided opposition focused on a difference in identities, separating those who had suffered and paid a price for their political activism from those who had not, accusing the latter of cooptation and collusion with the regime. Darrag said this major division in the former opposition carried over after 2011, with the persistence of “feelings within the Muslim Brotherhood that [the organization] had paid a high price” and that other opposition members “did not have the right to impose what they want.” In late June 2013, Murad Ali, a spokesman for the FJP, remarked, “with the current state of polarization and without reaching an understanding or working together, we will reach hell and kill each other in the streets.”¹⁰⁰ His remarks tragically foreshadowed the bloodshed that would occur only a few days later, ending the democratic transition.

Conclusion

In this paper, I introduced and tested one plausible mechanism through which the repression that defines authoritarian regimes affects processes of polarization in these systems, in turn conditioning levels of polarization at moments of transition. Repression affects how actors come to identify themselves, shaping related political preferences and the distribution of these preferences among political groups as well as conditioning the likelihood of cooperative behavior among them. My theory builds on insights from social psychology on the causes and consequences of group identification, and locates the explanation for polarization at the moment of potential political transition in the repressive nature of previous authoritarian regimes. Repressive environments either target repression at a specific opposition group, or are pervasive and affect all opposition groups. Targeted repression, following the logic of divide-and-conquer, increases polarization across the opposition. In contrast, widespread repression decreases within-group identification within opposition groups, which in turn decreases polarization in political preferences among these groups. Repression directly influences group identity and related preferences among the opposition, and the legacies of these experiences determine the level of preference polarization in the moment of transition from authoritarianism.

The lab experiments presented here were designed to test the psychological mechanism underpinning my theory, and indeed were a hard test, using randomly assigned fictional groups and plausible yet subtle priming in an artificial lab environment. The results demonstrate that repressive primes do affect individuals’ relative positioning with regards to the preferences of an out-group as well as their level of identification with their assigned group. The results also demonstrate that the effect of the repressive primes on distance from an out-group’s position was significantly mediated through in-group identification, particularly for the targeted repression treatment.

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in the New York Times, June 30, 2013. <https://nyti.ms/2x1ufyZ>.

Undoubtedly, there are other ways in which repression might affect polarization. For example, targeted repression creates a different socialization environment than widespread repression, and may create new, closer networks and personal connections among opposition groups.¹⁰¹ In addition, organizations under siege in a targeted repression environment defensively change the structure of their organization and demands of loyalty from members in a manner which can alienate moderates, further polarizing it from other groups.¹⁰² These factors are not important in the experimental set up, but in real world cases, repression likely affects polarization through all three reinforcing channels. Future scholarship should test the extent to which each component accounts for aggregate polarization, and whether affective and preference polarization are differently related to each potential effect of repression.

The idea that authoritarian historical legacies matter is not a new one, and this paper is in line with a number of studies that endogenize post-authoritarian political and party systems, political polarization, and political preferences and behaviors to the authoritarian conditions under which they form.¹⁰³ It is well established that authoritarian legacies set the sociological stage for transitions and can sow seeds among political actors that undermine democratic consolidation. However, I focus here on coercive rather than economic or political institutions as those aspects of authoritarian contexts that matter for political actors. Moreover, I argue for a different psychological mechanism for the effects authoritarian legacies that expands our theoretical understanding of polarization beyond explanations rooted in structure, strategy, or ideology. As is evident in the divergent trajectories of Egypt and Tunisia, the psychological legacy of particular repressive environments accumulates over decades, resulting in different levels of polarization that ultimately influence the contingent outcomes necessary for successful democratic transition.

¹⁰¹ Edwards (1970).

¹⁰² Davenport (2015).

¹⁰³ See Grzymala-Busse (2007); Hicken and Kuhonta (2015); Kalyvas (2006); Mainwaring (1989); Riedl (2014).

Appendix

Polarization and Group Identification: Further Mechanism Tests

The covariates included in regressions incorporate a number of attitudinal, demographic, and enumerator measurements. First, a respondent's relevant pre-treatment preferences were included; for the economic group, this was the respondent's level of agreement with the statement, "The government should take an active role in the economy instead of allowing for a free market economy," and for the religious group, this was the respondent's level of agreement with the statement, "The government and parliament should enact legislation according to Islamic law." In addition, a number of demographic controls were included. For the economic group, these variables captured the respondent's self-reported employment status, level of education, and household income, while for the religious group, the models included the respondent's self-reported frequency of attendance at Friday prayer and Qur'an readership in addition to level of education. Models run using the pooled data included both sets of attitudinal and demographic covariates. Another set of covariates included pre-treatment "groupness" variables, including self-reported current group membership (coded as 1 if the respondent reported being a member of a political, social, or economic group) as well as levels of general trust. I also included enumerator gender and, if female, whether the enumerator wore a veil in order to control for related enumerator effects that may influence individual answers related to identification and trust (Blaydes and Gillum 2013). In models using the pooled data, a dummy variable for group assignment was included (coded as 1 if the respondent was assigned to the religion and politics group), and all standard errors are clustered by the respondent's session.

Table 2: Group Identification and Positive Affect towards Out-Group

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Positive Affect towards Out-Group			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
In-Group Identification	-0.059 (0.059)	-0.073 (0.062)		
Out-Group Identification			0.558*** (0.037)	0.546*** (0.038)
Covariates		✓		✓
Constant	67.749*** (4.197)	71.819*** (10.181)	34.489*** (2.226)	42.618*** (7.799)
Observations	415	404	396	386
R ²	0.002	0.051	0.363	0.389
Adjusted R ²	-0.00000	0.020	0.361	0.368

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3: Group Identification and Distance from Out-Group Preferences

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Distance from Out-Group Preferences			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
In-Group Identification	0.003*** (0.001)	0.003*** (0.001)		
Out-Group Identification			-0.002*** (0.0005)	-0.002*** (0.0005)
Covariates		✓		✓
Constant	67.749*** (4.197)	71.819*** (10.181)	34.489*** (2.226)	42.618*** (7.799)
Observations	415	404	396	386
R ²	0.002	0.051	0.363	0.389
Adjusted R ²	-0.00000	0.020	0.361	0.368

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 4: Treatment Assignment, Group Identification, & Positive Affect towards Out-Group

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Positive Affect towards Out-Group			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Widespread Treatment	3.181 (2.918)	2.416 (2.959)	0.523 (2.474)	0.432 (2.544)
Targeted Treatment	-0.694 (2.862)	-1.245 (2.991)	0.774 (2.446)	-0.270 (2.550)
In-Group Identification		-0.049 (0.066)		0.053 (0.056)
Out-Group Identification			0.547*** (0.038)	0.553*** (0.040)
Covariates	✓	✓	✓	✓
Constant	64.289*** (9.244)	69.794*** (10.326)	42.304*** (7.886)	38.148*** (9.043)
Observations	417	404	386	375
R ²	0.046	0.055	0.389	0.388
Adjusted R ²	0.013	0.019	0.365	0.361

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 5: Treatment Assignment, Group Identification, & Distance from Out-Group

	<i>Dependent Variable:</i>			
	Distance from Out-Group Preferences			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Widespread Treatment	-0.154*** (0.028)	-0.150*** (0.028)	-0.147*** (0.029)	-0.145*** (0.029)
Targeted Treatment	0.063** (0.027)	0.047* (0.028)	0.063** (0.028)	0.052* (0.029)
In-Group Identification		0.001** (0.001)		0.001* (0.001)
Out-Group Identification			-0.002*** (0.0004)	-0.001*** (0.0005)
Covariates	✓	✓	✓	✓
Constant	0.746*** (0.089)	0.660*** (0.098)	0.849*** (0.092)	0.760*** (0.104)
Observations	417	407	385	377
R ²	0.191	0.217	0.232	0.246
Adjusted R ²	0.163	0.187	0.201	0.213

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

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